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The Washington Merry-go-round

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Secret report to air findings on CIA-mafia plot vs. Castro



WASHINGTON — Mafia godfathers wanted to knock off Cuban Premier Fidel Castro in the 1960s before the Central Intelligence Agency recruited them to do the job. They accepted the CIA's contract to kill Castro in order to compromise the federal government.

These are some of the startling conclusions that the House Assassinations Committee will present in its final report. The report hasn't yet been released to the public, but we can report it will air the CIA-Mafia plot against Castro thoroughly.

The report will raise the possibility that the plot to assassinate Castro might somehow have backfired against the late President John F. Kennedy, although the committee will largely exonerate Castro from involvement in the Kennedy killing.

"Organized crime was active in attempts to assassinate Castro independent of any activity it engaged in with the CIA," declares the unreleased report.

Quoting a top-secret 1977 CIA report, the committee notes that "it was possible that the CIA simply found itself involved in providing additional resources for independent operations that the syndicate already had underway . . . In a sense, the CIA may have been piggy-backing on the syndicate."

Adds the committee report: "Organized crime decided to assist the CIA for two reasons: CIA sponsorship would mean sanctioning and logistical support; and a relationship with the CIA in the assassination of a foreign leader could be used by organized crime as leverage to prevent prosecution for unrelated offenses."

In other words, the mob intended to use the CIA as a tool to force the federal government into easing its pressure on the underworld.

The committee is critical of the CIA for concealing its anti-Castro activity from the Warren Commission. The plot against Castro, states the report, "should have been aggressively explored" by the Warren Commission in 1963-64.

By way of background, the CIA had two operations going against Castro in the 1960s. One involved a high official of Castro's government, named Rolando Cubella but known to the CIA as AMLASH. He persuaded the CIA that he was willing to organize a coup against the Cuban dictator. The CIA was in contact with AMLASH from March 1961, until June 1965.

The other plot, initiated in 1960 a few months after Castro ousted Fulgencio Batista, involved CIA recruitment of U.S. mobsters to kill Castro. This plan was officially scrapped in February 1963, nine months before Kennedy was assassinated.

Several years ago the Senate Intelligence Committee concluded that Castro would not have blamed Kennedy for the CIA-Mafia plots against him. "Castro probably would not have been certain that the CIA was behind the underworld attempts," the Senate panel decided.

Nor would Castro have distinguished between CIA-encouraged plots and wildcat operations by Cuban exiles "which were not affiliated in any way with the CIA," the Senate report said.

The House committee is not so sure, however. It was "unable to confirm the findings of the Senate committee that there were reasons to discount the dangers to President Kennedy that may have resulted from CIA associations with the Mafia in anti-Castro activities." The committee also doesn't buy the Senate panel's view that Castro wouldn't have blamed Kennedy for the CIA plots.

Indeed, the House committee report concludes, if Castro erred in his assumptions about the Kennedy administration's involvement, "it was in the direction of attributing more, not less, U.S. government control over attempts to depose him."

The still-secret CIA report supports this position. But the CIA report agrees with the Senate committee that the Mafia plots ended months before the Dallas shooting and therefore would

have had minimal influence on (

Here again, the House committee is not so sure. "The record is clear that the relationships created by these plots did not terminate in February, 1963, the threat to Castro or President Kennedy abated by that time," states the report, made available to our staff by Tony Capaccio. "There is insufficient evidence to conclude that the sinister relationship became more intimate before Nov. 22, 1963."

As to the origins of the CIA-Mafia alliance to kill Castro, the House committee notes that both parties had motives: the CIA wanted to eliminate the Cuban dictator; the mob wanted political power; the mob wanted financial gain.

Their partnership may go down as the most sordid relationship in U.S. history.

SINGLE-ISSUE POLITICS: In the wake of close elections and single-issue pressure groups, a politician's fate often hangs on his position on one particular issue of public policy.

The gun lobby shot down former Sen. Clifford Case, R-N.J. Former Sen. William Hathaway, D-Me., won re-election in 1964 after a defeat for favoring the Panama Canal treaties. So did former Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Iowa.

As the pressure groups line up for the 1980 elections, one particular single-issue group that has become a target is Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho. He has been marked for political extinction by the anti-abortionists despite his generally conservative stand.

Like the right-to-lifers, Church opposes abortion, but accepts the notion that where the mother's life is in danger, the fetus must be aborted. He even favors letting hospital employees refuse to handle abortions on religious grounds.

But Church would permit abortions in cases of rape or incest, or when the mother would suffer severe and permanent damage if denied abortion. For right-to-lifers, this slight deviation from the orthodox line is enough to mark Church in with those who favor abortion on demand.